



The concept of man in Sri Aurobindo's poetry

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Abstract

Sri Aurobindo himself explains his aim in writing Savitri: "What I am trying to do everywhere in the poem is to express exactly something seen, something felt or experienced"

In Sri Aurobindo, we find the poetic transcription of his philosophical thoughts and yogic experiences where philosophical truths are turned into beauty and given a new significance by the transforming power of poetic vision. He is not a mere philosophical thinker but a 'poet seer of Truth'. The immensity of his thoughts is difficult to grasp. His poems are luminous and magnificent about Man and his future. The seer-poet's Spirit breathes in his poetry. It is a new kind of spiritual and Mystic poetry and therefore needs a "new extension of consciousness and aesthetics" to appreciate it. As a seer-poet, Sri Aurobindo gives us hope for a high destiny awaiting Man:

Keywords: Sri Aurobindo, Savitri, everywhere, poetry

Introduction

In the prone obscure beginnings of the race
The human grew in the bowed apelike man.
He stood erect, a godlike form and force, and a
soul's thoughts looked out from earthborn
eyes; Man stood erect, he wore the thinker's
brow: He looked at heaven and saw his
comrade stars (Sri Aurobindo, SABCL, Vol.
29, p. 485)

The animal is satisfied with a modicum of necessity; the gods are content with their splendours. But man cannot rest permanently until he reaches some highest good. He is the greatest of living beings because he is the most discontented, because he feels most the pressure of limitations. He alone, perhaps, is capable of being seized by the divine frenzy for a remote ideal.

(Sri Aurobindo, SABCL, Vol. 18, p.46)

The concept of Man has always been a fascination for philosophers, artists, poets and critics since time immemorial. From time to time, scientists, philosophers, thinkers and poets have invented new theories that throw new light on the existing concepts of human life. Variations in these theories often appear quite bewildering and at times even contradictory.

According to Sri Aurobindo's thought, Man is a transitional being and will be surpassed by a being of a higher consciousness. A Man has the innate capacity to outgrow his imperfections and grow into a creative, constructive and divinized higher being. He has ever been in search of God, Light, Freedom and Immortality.

To the question "What is man?", Sri Aurobindo offers several answers: 'luminous person', 'the increasing God,' 'self-liberating Person', 'the eternal portion of the Divine' 'a god in the making' and, a portion of the Divine consciousness and Essence.' These descriptions are a logical consequence of Sri Aurobindo's vision of reality.

Sri Aurobindo contends that man is not the end product of

evolution. Man is simply an intermediate creature between the animal and the Divine. As evolution has come up from mineral, vegetable and animal to human consciousness, the evolutionary process will continue from the mental to the supramental, and from man to superman. Sri Aurobindo says, "Man is a transitional being, he is not final; for in him and high beyond him ascend the radiant degrees which climb to a divine superman hood."

On the contrary, man is utterly insignificant if we consider him to be only a material being. But he is of supreme importance as a spiritual being. Sri Aurobindo says, "Materially you are nothing, spiritually you are everything." According to Sri Aurobindo's vision, there is one and eternal self behind the appearances of the universe The One self-unites all beings. It is only a separative consciousness, an ignorance of the true self in the mind, life and body that divides the beings. When man is able to remove the veil of separative consciousness, he can become aware of the true Self, the Divinity that resides in him and in all.

Sri Aurobindo believes that the One Being and Consciousness is already involved in Matter. By the process of evolution, it frees itself and grows higher and higher towards perfection. The Consciousness is self-impelled to grow continuously. First, life appears as a result of the release of consciousness, then appears mind. But the evolution does not stop with mind. Evolution continues towards the emergence of the Supermind. The process of evolution has a double movement. An arising aspiration from below gets a response from above. In Nature, an ascending evolution goes from the stone to the plant, from the plant to the animal, from the animal to man. Man is not at the last rung of the ascending evolution. In his nature, habits and instincts, man is still much like an animal. Nature endeavours for the emergence of a new man whose consciousness will be much higher than the mental consciousness.

Sri Aurobindo reveals that man lives in a mental consciousness but he is capable of acquiring the

Supramental of the Truth Consciousness. It is very much possible for man to live perfectly harmonious, beautiful and conscious life. In the Divine plan of evolution, Matter rising towards the Spirit, man has a crucial role to play. Man is at the summit and forefront of creation because he has a mind and self-awareness. Thus he capable to participate consciously in the evolutionary movement. Other living species do not possess such capacities. Evolution cannot stop with man It must go beyond man to Supermanhood, and ultimately to the Supreme Reality. There is an upward movement in man and far beyond man.

Man is the link between what must be and what is, connecting the infinite unmanifest and the multitude of manifest forms. He has a foremost place in the evolutionary scaled yet he is a transitional being. As nature has prepared the way of man's appearance, so must emerge Superman, a higher species of being. Man must consciously participate in the evolutionary process of Nature.

Man should become aware of various layers or planes – higher mind, illumined mind, intuitive mind, overmind and Supermind. He should rise to a higher consciousness than hitherto realized.

Consciousness is a Force, Ancient India Scriptures call it Chit, meaning consciousness inseparable from Shakti. Sri Aurobindo believes that consciousness is the spirit, the only source of energy.

Consciousness means also awareness. There are ascending grades of consciousness. Man is capable of attaining higher states of consciousness. But evolution is consciousness does not proceed in a straight line. While man is poised for such a growth in consciousness, strangely enough instead of being helped he is limited by the nature of his mind.

Man should aspire to attain psychical, new and higher state of consciousness where mentally irreconcilable situations can be reconciled. There is the possibility of a radical, evolutionary transformation of human consciousness. Man should move from the personal egoistic consciousness toward a consideration of the inner real meanings of things, and then finally to that great mutation in the consciousness where one perceives the Divine everywhere and in everything.

Founding the divine life on earth was the mission and vision of Sri Aurobindo. He called the higher consciousness the "Supramental Consciousness" or the "Supermind" and named the future being as the "Superman". He foresaw the coming of superman, another species, as the hidden and inherent paradigm of Nature to aid Man's process of evolutionary growth in consciousness and transformation of man.

Sri Aurobindo is "the most outstanding Indo-Anglian writer for volume as well as variety". Amid all the many-faceted achievements, Sri Aurobindo never abandoned his first love – poetry, as he himself has once declared that he had been first and foremost a poet, that the poet was the earliest side of his personality, the primal aspect. His poetic career spreads over a period of sixty years from 1890 to 1950 during which he has enriched the realm of letters. The two volumes of Collected Poems and Plays, the multi-aspected epic Savitri with its 24,000 lines, narrative poems, a large body of philosophical poems and the clusters of lyrics represent the poetic stature of Sri Aurobindo.

Sri Aurobindo's poetic career was born in England, developed and expanded in Baroda and Calcutta and reached perfection in Pondicherry. His poetic career

underwent a process of gradual evolution. His poetry followed the same curve of evolution as that of his consciousness through yoga and it reveals 'adventure of consciousness', while his early poetry reveals him as a sensuous Romantic poet who has found his footing in English poetry. The later poetry reveals him turning into a prophet and a seer.

Born in India but educated from his boyhood in England and speaking the English language as his mother-tongue, he was at the age of nineteen an unmistakable poet. His early poems reveals his joyous reaction to the beauties of nature and the grace and charm of human nature. Poems such as Songs to Myrtilla, Night by the Sea, The Island Grave, The Lover's Complaint in love in Sorrow, marked with sensuous imagery, are moving poetic utterances. The poems are the sprouts of not only emotions of joy and melancholy, but also of young imagination stirred by inspiring episodes like the Irish fight for freedom. The young poet was deeply interested in politics, particularly Irish politics because it bore closeness to conditions prevailing in India. In a number of memorial poems, he pays tributes to Goethe, Bankim Chandra Chatterjee and Madhusudan Dutt. He expresses his glowing admiration to Bankim Chandra who gave the reviving Mantra 'Bande mataram': "O master of delicious words!" and "the sweetest voice that ever spoke in prose." He calls Madhusudan Dutt the "Poet, who first with skill inspired did teach Greatness to our divine Bengali speech." Even in his youthful poetry Songs to Myrtilla, mainly secular and sensuous, there are vague mystic hints which prophesy the philosophical poetry of later years.

Sri Aurobindo started his adventure in narrative realm in longer poems – Urvasie, Chitrangada, The Rishi, Uloupie, The Tale of Nala and Love and Death. In Urvasie, the first achievement in the field of narrative poetry, he has rendered the Urvasie legend on an epic scale endowing it with racial and prophetic significance. With its wealth of sensuous elaboration and epic similes, its subtle fusion of earthly with the celestial, its suggestions of the affiliations between earth and heaven, Urvasie is a forceful delineation of the drama of man's temptation and fall.

In Love and Death, a companion poem, shorter than Urvasie, Sri Aurobindo has taken the story from Mahabharata. The poem, full of youthful passion, is charged with an intense love of life. These poems illustrate the early growth of conceptions that were later to become central to Sri Aurobindo's outlook on life. Life as a journey and a struggle, life as a calling of greater heights, a resisting of temptations, an appreciation of the glory and sensual ecstasy of love and a call to transcend it for a greater cause.

It is the theme of Love and Death which runs through these poems. In Urvasie, Death is conceived as liberator and reconciler. Love and Death demonstrates the supremacy of Love over Death. In Baji Prabhou, the warrior does not shrink death, nor terrified by it. On the contrary, he invites and faces it like a fighter.

Sri Aurobindo seems to convey that whoever would save his soul, must be first prepared to lose his life for a worthy cause; 'Sacrifice offered at the altar of a noble ideal is alone the true gateway to the soul's freedom and immortality'.

Through his sonnets, Sri Aurobindo expressed metaphysical Indian concepts of Man and his spiritual visions and realizations. The sonnets are "snaps of spiritual autobiography, and what is essential in these has gone to enrich the total content of Savitri." (K.R.S Iyengar) Sonnets

reveal Sri Aurobindo grappling with Reality with the help of intellect and imagination. Coming from the Higher Mind or Illumined Mind, they are distant flashes and shadowy reflections, not rays from the Centre of Light." In his sonnet "Man the Thinking Animal", he speaks of man as:

A creature of his own grey ignorance, a mind
half-shadow and half-gleam aspiring to
godhead from insensible clay He travels slow-
footed towards the eternal day.

"Man the Enigma" speaks of man's struggles with blind forces of Nature to attain Divinity: "A demigod and a demon and a brute, the slave and the creator of his fate."

In "Man the Mediator", he speaks of: "Rooted in mire heavenward man's nature growth, his soul the dim bud of God's flaming rose."

Man is a bundle of contrary qualities: "A Swift Tornado of God – energy; and yet he is weaker than a reed one breaks with ease."

Man's journey towards his divine nature is full of difficulties and pains. In the sonnet "Evolution", the poet speaks of the entire concept of evolution: "All is not finished in the Unseen's decree. A mind beyond our mind demands our ken."

Man's transit from sorrow to joy, from darkness to light, from ignorance to wisdom is conveyed in the sonnet entitled The Human Enigma: "A deep enigma is the soul of man. His conscious life obeys the Inconscient's rule His need of joy is learned in sorrow's school."

Sri Aurobindo has uplifted the sonnet as an excellent means of conveying great spiritual truths. Most of his later lyrics are sonnets and are reflections of the highest terms of life, joy of being, delight of realization and correspond in thought and substance to the philosophical concepts expounded by him in his *The Life Divine*. A glance at the contents of the poem gives us a fair idea of the poet's intuitive occupation in sonnets. *The Kingdom Within*, *The Indwelling Universal*, *The Inconscient*, *Liberation*, *Immortality*, *Evolution*, *transformation* and *Nirvana*.

In *Savitri – A Legend and a Symbol*, we find the fulfillment of Sri Aurobindo's long poetic career. His poetical consciousness with a glorious vision for mankind finds fullest expression in the epic form. The cosmic epic of nearly 24,000 lines arranged in 12 Books and 49 Cantos, took fifty years to grow in bulk and its ever-rising heights or levels of consciousness. *Savitri* has been considered by a western philosopher-critic Raymond Frank Piper as "probably the greatest epic in the English language. It is the most comprehensive, integrated, beautiful and beautiful and perfect cosmic poem ever composed. It ranges symbolically from a primordial cosmic void through earth's darkness and struggles, to the highest realms of Supramental spiritual existence, and illumines every important concern of man. *Savitri* is perhaps the most powerful artistic works in the world for expanding man's mind towards the Absolute.

Sri Aurobindo has transformed the legend from the Mahabharata into a symbol of cosmic significance. The canvas of *Savitri* takes into preview worlds of being that are not yet recognized by humanity, the different planes of Light, Consciousness and Bliss, the worlds of Truth. We find in *Savitri* mysticism, occultism, philosophy, history of evolution, history of man and all that is there in human experience. It achieves Sri Aurobindo's belief expressed in

The Future Poetry that the epics of the soul will "reveal from the highest pinnacle and with the largest field of vision the destiny of the human spirit and the presence and ways and purpose of the Divinity in men and the universe."

The problem is of man's imperfection and his unquenchable thirst for perfection, of his groping in the darkness of ignorance and his seeking for light, of his mortality and his thirst for Immortality. *Savitri* lays down the conditions of the problem in clearest manner. The story attains its spiritual significance and the fate of Satyavan rings with the destiny of man. Man, the transitional being, the middle term between neoscience and superconsciousness, sees the forces of the neither worlds and also the possibilities of the higher worlds. Man has to work out his destiny with the Divine help on the terrestrial globe. To the vision of Sri Aurobindo, the whole of life is the legitimate field for the Divine to manifest himself. "In raising this basic problem of elimination of the Inconscient, the cause of man's subjection to his imperfection, suffering and evil, *Savitri* is unique and goes deeper than other epics towards its solution. It calls out the Divine that is hidden at present in the human mould to deal direct with the problem of man's emancipation and of establishment of the divine kingdom on earth." The poet goes to the root of the problem and gives us by authentic occult and spiritual experience the answer to many of our problems about mind, spirit, ignorance, fate and Divine Will.

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